

CHAPTER 1

WATERSHED APPROACH TO WATER QUALITY

1.1 Background

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1.1 BACKGROUND. The Division of Water Pollution Control is responsible for administration of the Tennessee Water Quality Control Act of 1977 (TCA 69-3-101). Information about the Division of Water Pollution Control, updates and announcements, may be found at <http://www.state.tn.us/environment/wpc/>, and a summary of the organization of the Division of Water Pollution Control may be found in Appendix I.

The mission of the Division of Water Pollution Control is to abate existing pollution of the waters of Tennessee, to reclaim polluted waters, to prevent the future pollution of the waters, and to plan for the future use of the waters so that the water resources of Tennessee might be used and enjoyed to the fullest extent consistent with the maintenance of unpolluted waters.

The Division monitors, analyzes, and reports on the quality of Tennessee's water. In order to perform these tasks more effectively, the Division adopted a Watershed Approach to Water Quality in 1996.

This Chapter summarizes TDEC's Watershed Approach to Water Quality.

1.2 WATERSHED APPROACH TO WATER QUALITY. The Watershed Approach to Water Quality is a coordinating framework designed to protect and restore aquatic systems and protect human health more effectively (EPA841-R-95-003). The Approach is based on the concept that many water quality problems, like the accumulation of pollutants or nonpoint source pollution, are best addressed at the watershed level. In addition, a watershed focus helps identify the most cost-effective pollution control strategies to meet clean water goals. Tennessee's Watershed Approach, updates and public participation opportunities, may be found on the web at <http://www.state.tn.us/environment/wpc/watershed/>.

Watersheds are appropriate as organizational units because they are readily identifiable landscape units with readily identifiable boundaries that integrate terrestrial, aquatic, and geologic processes. Focusing on the whole watershed helps reach the best balance among efforts to control point source pollution and polluted runoff as well as protect drinking water sources and sensitive natural resources such as wetlands (EPA-840-R-98-001).

Four main features are typical of the Watershed Approach: 1) Identifying and prioritizing water quality problems in the watershed, 2) Developing increased public involvement, 3) Coordinating activities with other agencies, and 4) Measuring success through increased and more efficient monitoring and other data gathering.

Typically, the Watershed Approach meets the following description (EPA841-R-95-003):

- Features watersheds or basins as the basic management units
- Targets priority subwatersheds for management action
- Addresses all significant point and nonpoint sources of pollution
- Addresses all significant pollutants
- Sets clear and achievable goals
- Involves the local citizenry in all stages of the program
- Uses the resources and expertise of multiple agencies
- Is not limited by any single agency's responsibilities
- Considers public health issues

An additional characteristic of the Watershed Approach is that it complements other environmental activities. This allows for close cooperation with other state agencies and local governments as well as with federal agencies such as the Tennessee Valley Authority and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Department of Agriculture (e.g., Natural Resources Conservation Service, United States Forest Service), U.S. Department of the Interior (e.g. United States Geological Survey, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service). When all permitted dischargers are considered together, agencies are better able to focus on those controls necessary to produce measurable improvements in water quality. This also results in a more efficient process: It encourages agencies to focus staff and financial resources on prioritized geographic locations and makes it easier to coordinate between agencies and individuals with an interest in solving water quality problems (EPA841-R-003).

The Watershed Approach is not a regulatory program or a new EPA mandate; rather it is a decision making process that reflects a common strategy for information collection and analysis as well as a common understanding of the roles, priorities, and responsibilities of all stakeholders within a watershed. The Watershed Approach utilizes features already in state and federal law, including:

- Water Quality Standards
- National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES)
- Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs)
- Clean Lakes Program
- Nonpoint Source Program
- Groundwater Protection

Traditional activities like permitting, planning, and monitoring are also coordinated in the Watershed Approach. A significant change from the past, however, is that the Watershed Approach encourages integration of traditional regulatory (point source pollution) and nonregulatory (nonpoint sources of pollution) programs. There are additional changes from the past as well:

THE PAST	WATERSHED APPROACH
Focus on fixed-station ambient monitoring	Focus on comprehensive watershed monitoring
Focus on pollutant discharge sites	Focus on watershed-wide effects
Focus on WPC programs	Focus on coordination and cooperation
Focus on point sources of pollution	Focus on all sources of pollution
Focus on dischargers as the problem	Focus on dischargers as an integral part of the solution
Focus on short-term problems	Focus on long-term solutions

Table 1-1. Contrast Between the Watershed Approach and the Past.

This approach places greater emphasis on all aspects of water quality, including chemical water quality (conventional pollutants, toxic pollutants), physical water quality (temperature, flow), habitat quality (channel morphology, composition and health of benthic communities), and biodiversity (species abundance, species richness).

1.2.A. Components of the Watershed Approach. Tennessee is composed of fifty-five watersheds corresponding to the 8-digit USGS Hydrologic Unit Codes (HUC-8). These watersheds, which serve as geographic management units, are combined in five groups according to year of implementation.

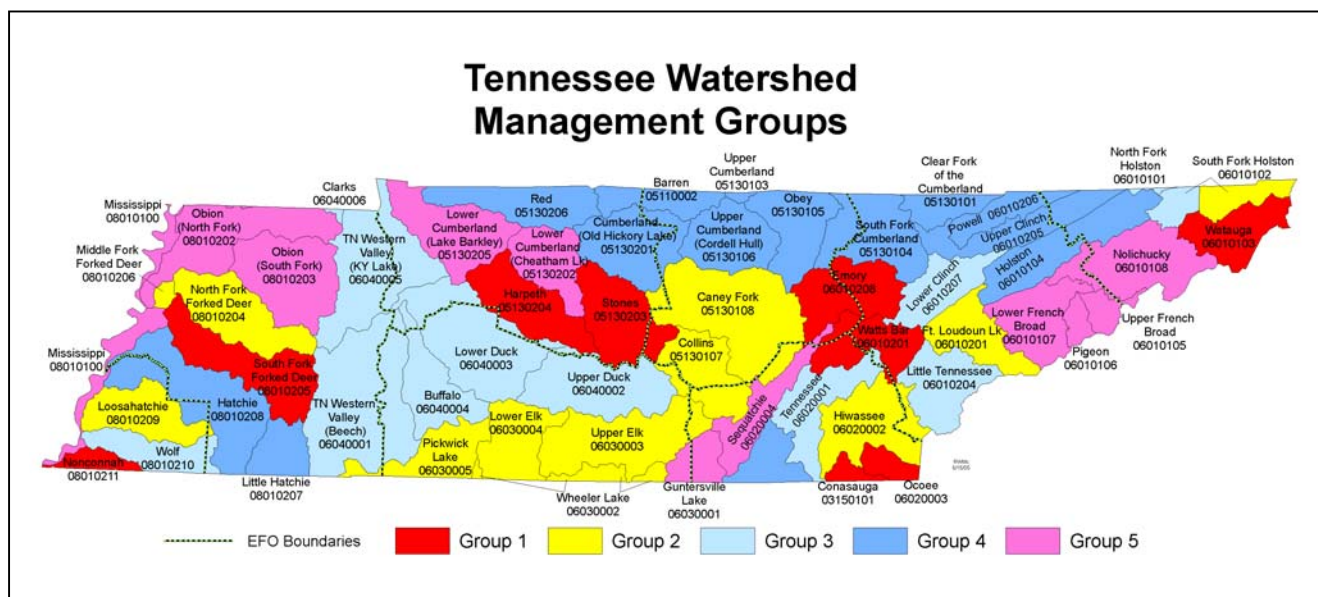


Figure 1-1. Watershed Groups in Tennessee's Watershed Approach to Water Quality.

Each year, TDEC conducts monitoring in one-fifth of Tennessee's watersheds; assessment, priority setting and follow-up monitoring are conducted in another one fifth of watersheds; modeling and TMDL studies in another one fifth; developing management plans in another one fifth; and implementing management plans in another one fifth of watersheds.

GROUP	WEST TENNESSEE	MIDDLE TENNESSEE	EAST TENNESSEE
1	Nonconnah South Fork Forked Deer	Harpeth Stones	Conasauga Emory Ocoee Watauga Watts Bar
2	Loosahatchie Middle Fork Forked Deer North Fork Forked Deer	Caney Fork Collins Lower Elk Pickwick Lake Upper Elk Wheeler Lake	Fort Loudoun Hiwassee South Fork Holston (Upper) Wheeler Lake
3	Tennessee Western Valley (Beech River) Tennessee Western Valley (KY Lake) Wolf River	Buffalo Lower Duck Upper Duck	Little Tennessee Lower Clinch North Fork Holston South Fork Holston (Lower) Tennessee (Upper)
4	Lower Hatchie Upper Hatchie	Barren Obey Red Upper Cumberland (Cordell Hull Lake) Upper Cumberland (Old Hickory Lake) Upper Cumberland (Cumberland Lake)	Holston Powell South Fork Cumberland Tennessee (Lower) Upper Clinch Upper Cumberland (Clear Fork)
5	Mississippi North Fork Obion South Fork Obion	Guntersville Lake Lower Cumberland (Cheatham Lake) Lower Cumberland (Lake Barkley)	Lower French Broad Nolichucky Pigeon Upper French Broad

Table 1-2. Watershed Groups in Tennessee's Watershed Approach.

In succeeding years of the cycle, efforts rotate among the watershed groups. The activities in the five year cycle provide a reference for all stakeholders.

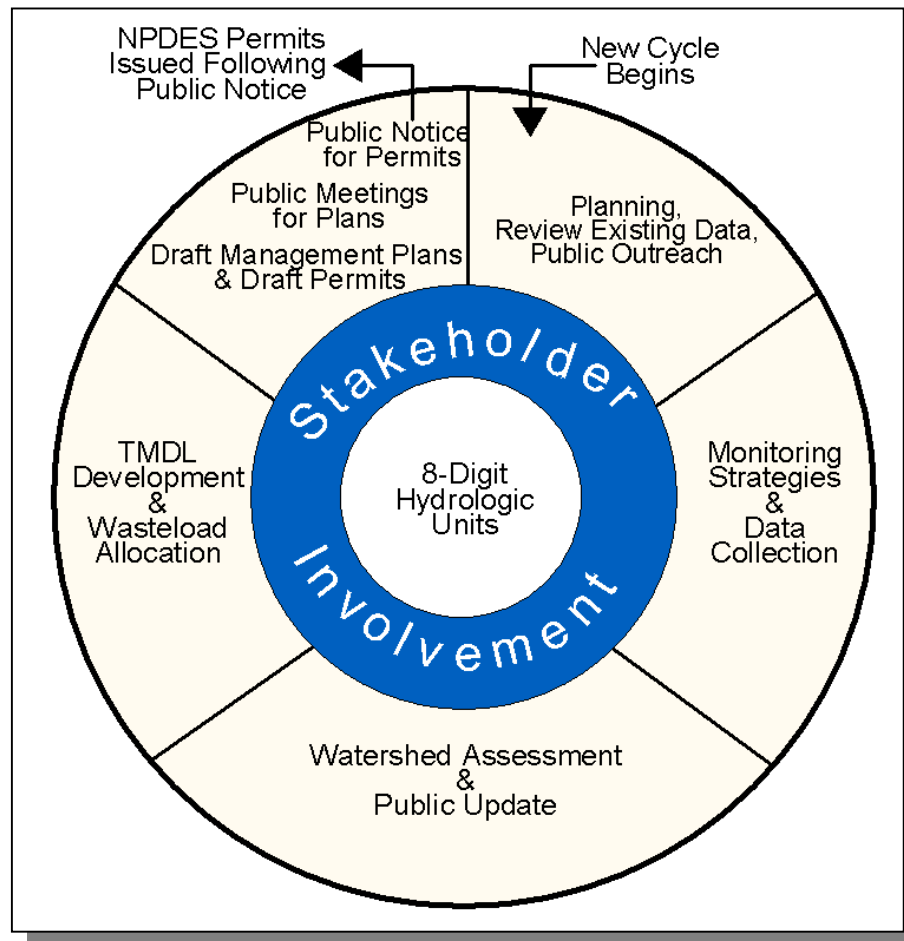


Figure 1-2. The Watershed Approach Cycle.

The six key activities that take place during the cycle are:

1. Planning and Existing Data Review. Existing data and reports from appropriate agencies and organizations are compiled and used to describe the current conditions and status of rivers and streams. Reviewing all existing data and comparing agencies' work plans guide the development of an effective monitoring strategy.
2. Monitoring. Field data is collected for streams in the watershed. These data supplement existing data and are used for the water quality assessment.
3. Assessment. Monitoring data are used to determine the status of the stream's designated use supports.
4. Wasteload Allocation/TMDL Development. Monitoring data are used to determine nonpoint source contributions and pollutant loads for permitted dischargers releasing wastewater to the watershed. Limits are set to assure that water quality is protected.
5. Permits. Issuance and expiration of all discharge permits are synchronized based on watersheds. Currently, 1700 permits have been issued in Tennessee under the federally delegated National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES).
6. Watershed Management Plans. These plans include information for each watershed including general watershed description, water quality goals, major water quality concerns and issues, and management strategies.

Public participation opportunities occur throughout the entire five year cycle. Participation in Years 1, 3 and 5 is emphasized, although additional meetings are held at stakeholder's request. People tend to participate more readily and actively in protecting the quality of waters in areas where they live and work, and have some roles and responsibilities:

- Data sharing
- Identification of water quality stressors
- Participation in public meetings
- Commenting on management plans
- Shared commitment for plan implementation

1.2.B. Benefits of the Watershed Approach. The Watershed Approach fosters a better understanding of the physical, chemical and biological effects on a watershed, thereby allowing agencies and citizens to focus on those solutions most likely to be effective. The Approach recognizes the need for a comprehensive, ecosystem-based approach that depends on local governments and local citizens for success (EPA841-R-95-004). On a larger scale, many lessons integrating public participation with aquatic ecosystem-based programs have been learned in the successful Chesapeake Bay, Great Lakes, Clean Lakes, and National Estuary Programs.

Benefits of the Watershed Approach include (EPA841-R-95-004):

- Focus on water quality goals and ecological integrity rather than on program activities such as number of permits issued.
- Improve basis for management decisions through consideration of both point and nonpoint source stressors. A watershed strategy improves the scientific basis for decision making and focuses management efforts on basins and watersheds where they are most needed. Both point and nonpoint control strategies are more effective under a watershed approach because the Approach promotes timely and focused development of TMDLs.
- Enhance program efficiency, as the focus becomes watershed. A watershed focus can improve the efficiency of water management programs by facilitating consolidation of programs within each watershed. For example, handling all point source dischargers in a watershed at the same time reduces administrative costs due to the potential to combine hearings and notices as well as allowing staff to focus on more limited areas in a sequential fashion.
- Improve coordination between federal, state and local agencies including data sharing and pooling of resources. As the focus shifts to watersheds, agencies are better able to participate in data sharing and coordinated assessment and control strategies.
- Increase public involvement. The Watershed Approach provides opportunities for stakeholders to increase their awareness of water-related issues and inform staff about their knowledge of the watershed. Participation is via three public meetings over the five-year watershed management cycle as well as meetings at stakeholder's request. Additional opportunities are provided through the Department of Environment and Conservation homepage and direct contact with local Environmental Assistance Centers.
- Greater consistency and responsiveness. Developing goals and management plans for a basin or watershed with stakeholder involvement results in increased responsiveness to the public and consistency in determining management actions. In return, stakeholders can expect improved consistency and continuity in decisions when management actions follow a watershed plan.

Additional benefits of working at the watershed level are described in the Clean Water Action Plan (EPA-840-R-98-001), and can be viewed at <http://www.cleanwater.gov/action/toc.html>.

The Watershed Approach represents awareness that restoring and maintaining our waters requires crossing traditional barriers (point vs. nonpoint sources of pollution) when designing solutions. These solutions increasingly rely on participation by both public and private sectors, where citizens, elected officials and technical personnel all have opportunity to participate. This integrated approach mirrors the complicated relationships in which people live, work and recreate in the watershed, and suggests a comprehensive, watershed-based and community-based approach is needed to address these (EPA841-R-97-005).